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SUBJECT: FOUR TIMES A CHARM: PRESIDENT BASHIR VISITS JUBA

¶1. (U) Summary: On February 14, Government of National Unity President Omer Hassan Ahmed al Bashir paid a brief visit to Juba as part of a one-day swing through the South, including Bahr el Ghazal and Rumbek. Bashir addressed the population of Juba, promising to deal with the Lord's Resistance Army and provide various forms of assistance to the South. He called for continued unity after the six-year interim period stipulated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), but said that he would accept a southern vote for independence. Bashir's reception was cordial, if not warm. End summary.

Four's a Charm

¶2. (U) President Bashir paid a ninety-minute visit to Juba the morning of February 14 before departing for stops in Bahr el Ghazal and Rumbek, a trip that had been announced but then postponed on three prior occasions, including the January 9 celebration one-year anniversary of the signature of the CPA. There was a heavy Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and national police presence in town - security concerns were rumored to have influenced prior postponement of the visit - with Joint Integrated Units (JIU) and SPLA also standing guard at Freedom Square. The assembled crowd numbered less than half those who had come for the January 9 event. Virtually all GoSS dignitaries were present along with Bashir's entourage from Khartoum.

Thanks for Coming, and What About the LRA?

¶3. (U) Bahr el Jebel Governor Clement Wani Konga made brief remarks, noting that Bashir had been "too long in coming south," and even that morning the citizens of Juba had not been certain Bashir would show. Wani received rousing applause when he stated that he hoped that Bashir had come with a solution for insecurity provoked by the LRA in the South. GoSS President Salva Kiir spoke next, citing an African version of the proverb about "crying wolf" and losing credibility - he cited this as the reason for the moderate turnout, since most Jubans had not believed that Bashir would really arrive.

Help on the Way, Unity the Goal

¶4. (U) President Bashir took the podium to muted applause and delivered a twenty-minute address that hit the right notes. He commenced that two decades ago everyone had

cried wolf as well, claiming the peace was at hand. But now, believe it or not, peace was here and should endure. Bashir said that the GNU would provide security for the South and that he would give the JIU's responsibility for dealing with the LRA once and for all, thus providing southerners the security they deserved. He said that after one month, he expected to hear no more about problems caused by the LRA.

¶5. (U) President Bashir ticked off other areas in which the GNU stood ready to provide assistance to the South. He cited health, roads, and education as areas of emphasis, and promised that the GNU would provide the South seeds and agricultural implements before the planting season begins. Bashir said that he had provided twenty tons of asphalt to repave the roads of Juba town, since it was important that those living there prepare the town for the return of refugees and IDPs.

¶6. (U) Bashir said that his first and most important priority as president of the GNU was to ensure that unity prevailed at the end of six years; the GNU would work to make such unity worthwhile. He stressed that there was not difference between Muslims and Christians: all Sudanese were equal. He concluded that while he sought unity, if the people of Southern Sudan should opt for independence, he would accept this and work to see that the two countries that emerged from the state of Sudan would continue to work hand in hand.

Comment

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¶7. (SBU) While President Bashir's promises were well received by the crowd, there was healthy skepticism among GoSS figures after the event. The JIUs are not formed and ready to deploy: unless the SAF and the SPLA stand ready to take on the LRA, a short-term solution does not seem likely. Paved roads would be welcome in Juba, but donors are taking the lead in the other priority areas in which Bashir promised that the GNU would engage.

STEINFELD